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WIPP Driver Makes History, Again

CARLSBAD, N.M., August 31, 2011 - A brand-new shipping package arrived at the Department of Energy's Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) during the early evening hours of August 25, but an all-too familiar face was behind the wheel of the vehicle carrying the package.

Long-time WIPP driver Randy Anderson made history, again, when he guided the new TRUPACT-III on its maiden voyage from the Savannah River Site (SRS), located near Aiken, S.C., to the underground repository for defense-generated transuranic (TRU) waste near Carlsbad, N.M.

"The trip was uneventful," said Anderson at the conclusion of the 1,534 mile trip from SRS to WIPP. "There were no mechanical problems and no safety issues. Everything went according to plan, and the trailer pulls nice."

Anderson's participation in monumental WIPP shipments reads a lot like the key history of the entire WIPP project. He was one of two drivers who brought the first shipment of TRU waste from Los Alamos National Laboratory to Carlsbad in 1999. A month later, he was one of the drivers who brought the first interstate shipment to WIPP. He was also behind the wheel when the first shipment of waste arrived from the Hanford Site in Washington State, and he also drove the final shipment of TRU waste out of Rocky Flats. Finally, he helped drive when the first shipment of remote-handled TRU waste arrived at WIPP in 2007.

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Most recently, Anderson shared first-shipment TRUPACT-III driving duties with Henry Leyva. Both men work for CAST Specialty Transportation, which holds one of two transportation contracts with WIPP.

The box-shaped TRUPACT-III is an Nuclear Regulatory Commission-approved Type B package used to transport TRU waste in a Standard Large Box-2 (SLB2) by highway trucks. The TRUPACT-III, allows SRS, and potentially other sites, to ship large items of contact-handled (CH) TRU waste that will not fit in current packages. WIPP will eventually have a total of six TRUPACT-IIIs.

“With the TRUPACT-III, instead of having to break large waste items down and risk unnecessary exposure to workers, we’re able to package larger items and get them disposed of safely,” said CBFO Interim Manager Ed Ziemianski. He said funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act was key to the TRUPACT-III’s success. The design and manufacturing of the TRUPACT-III was completed with \$12 million in funding from the Recovery Act.

The first TRUPACT-III shipment rolled into New Mexico’s Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance (CVSA) inspection station near the Southeastern New Mexico town of Loving at around 3:30 p.m. August 25. There, two Motor Transportation Police performed an extensive CVSA Level VI inspection on the vehicle and the package to ensure that nothing was amiss.

“We have the best drivers on the road in the country,” said Carlsbad Field Office (CBFO) National TRU Program Director J.R. Stroble. “We’re proud of that, and they’re proud to drive the trucks. The reputation they’ve developed over the years makes it easy to go out to the public and sell the idea of moving radioactive waste across the highway. When WIPP trucks are on the road, the public is confident these are the safest trucks are on the road, with the highest level of training and commitment from the drivers.”

Leyva said the TRUPACT-III’s first shipment felt a lot like all of the other shipments he’s made over the past nine years. “It was kind of exciting at first, but once you started the trip, everything fell into place and was basically the same thing,” he said.

The two drivers rotated during the trip to WIPP, with the alternate resting in a sleeper in the back of the vehicle. Whoever was driving chose the music. "I like 70s. He likes old, old country," Leyva said about their preferences. The drivers also have favorite spots along the route. Leyva said he always looks forward to the catfish served in Forrest County, Miss.

The CVSA Level VI inspection lasted 45 minutes. After that, with Anderson behind the wheel, the TRUPACT-III made the final leg of its journey to WIPP. There, after another mechanical, security and radiological inspection, the package was removed from the trailer.

Their parts concluded, Anderson and Leyva then drove back to CAST's Carlsbad yard, where the two men spent the better part of an hour washing their vehicle. Both men then had a couple of days off before their next road trip.

Anderson grew up in Wisconsin and has been driving professionally since 1967. He moved to New Mexico in the 1990s on a recommendation from his brother, who suggested WIPP. Because WIPP was experiencing some legal delays at the time, Anderson worked for another company for two years before joining CAST in 1996 as one of the company's first drivers.

A couple of years into his tenure at WIPP, Anderson won first place in the tanker division of New Mexico's truck rodeo, a competition which includes an inspection, interview, written segment and driving course, and he went on to compete in nationals.

"Randy Anderson is the kind of driver I wish I could clone," said CAST Specialty Transportation Operations Manager Gaylon Fuller. "I have known Randy, who is a top notch employee that is dependable and trustworthy, since 1998 when I was a Motor Transportation Inspector and have had the privilege to work with him as regulator and now as his supervisor."

WIPP's drivers must pass an extensive driving and background check before they can even be considered for employment. After that, there are a number of extensive road tests. They receive about 200 hours of training, including lessons in emergency management and communications.

Anderson said he plans to drive for WIPP for another eight years. "I'll be 70 then, so maybe I'll go part time," he said. "I like the people and the great safety program, and I just really like to drive."

Photo caption: CAST truck drivers Randy Anderson (left) and Henry Leyva stand in front of the new TRUPACT-III shipping package Aug. 25, 2011, at a Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance inspection station near Loving, N.M. It's another historical moment for Anderson, who also drove the first shipment of transuranic (TRU) waste to WIPP in 1999 and the first remote-handled TRU shipment there in 2007.

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